

Contributions

LIMITATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

P. J. BROWN

Webster gives about eight different shades of meaning to the word liberty. The first covers even more ground than is compatible with wholesome church government. It is as follows: "The state of a free man; ability to do as one pleases; freedom from restraint."

Accepting this definition, with all that it allows, would, in the sense of civil liberty, justify the course of Herr Most, the hay market rioters, the murderers of Dr. Cronin, and all the diabolical acts in history, even the murder and boiling into shapeless mass of his wife by the notorious Lutgert. We do not believe that Mr. Webster entertained any such views, altho his definition, interpreted in the broad sense it admits of would allow such a construction. Evidently Mr. Webster was a good citizen and as such would require this liberty regulated by law and as long as the good sense of the people demands the wholesome restraints of law, founded upon the principle of equity, aiming at the greatest good to the greatest number, susceptible of modification as changed circumstances may demand, society will be safe, and the people will be happy in the possessions of their liberty, ever remembering however that we must have law for the punishment of evil doers, and that for the safety of society these laws must be strictly and impartially enforced.

The same is true, and in a certain sense every principle delineated in the foregoing remarks obtain in the case of Christian liberty. If all who have laid claim to Christianity possessed the character in full that is expressed in the word Christian we would indeed need no restraining limit, neither indeed would civil liberty need any restraining laws if all men possessed all of the characteristics contemplated in the word civil, for then all men would restrain themselves into channels of right, and the great law of heaven would be lived out. Men would "do unto others as they would have others do unto them." But unfortunately, for poor, frail humanity, the millennium has not yet arrived and while living under the present dispensation our liberties, both in church and state, must be regulated by law, and the question as to who is to inaugurate the laws is an important one for us to consider.

In our civil jurisprudence certain persons are set apart by the people, whose duty it is to enact all laws supposed to be necessary for the proper regulation of business and conduct. These laws must be in accordance with the fundamental laws of the State called the constitution, and in order to test their constitutionality courts are established, who are supposed to be able to give correct decisions, and the people must abide the verdict, until such time as it may be changed by regular process of law. Any attempt to in-

terpret either law or constitution by any or all individuals according to their several fancies would soon plunge a State into anarchy and society into chaos. The same is true (as we have repeatedly learned to our sorrow) in regard to Christian liberty. A very large per cent of those who have assumed the name Christian, are and always were in need of wholesome restraints, not only as regards their moral conduct, but their views and fancies in the interpretation of the gospel are so lame and visionary that to allow the unlimited liberty to teach them to others would soon play havoc with the peace of the church.

We understand the gospel of Christ to be the perfect law of liberty to all who will embrace it. It guarantees freedom from sin and eternal life, even as does the constitution of the United States the boon of civil liberty to all who are gathered under the folds of the Stars and Stripes. The gospel is the fundamental law of the church even more emphatically than our civil constitution because, unlike the latter, it is the work of inspiration. It cannot be altered or amended. Under it the church is organized, or at least should be, and in order to successful work *must* be organized. Any organization is no longer the property of any individual, but belongs equally to all the members of the organization, and any attempt upon the part of the individual to change any article of faith or practice, any of the ordinances of the church in a manner essentially different from the rule agreed upon in the organization, necessarily makes himself a disturber of the peace and harmony of the church, and in order to save the body from discord and final ecclesiastical anarchy, there must be a limit put to this liberty just as the State puts a limit to the liberty of the men who disturb the peace of society.

Do you ask, Suppose the individual conscientiously believes his way to be the better, will you ask him to stifle his convictions? In answer to this question we will say, learn wisdom of the children of this world. They settle their difference in their civil and criminal courts, and if the disturber will not abide the decision but persist in the course of disturbing the peace, the State has a house where he is put in order to keep the peace. And so has the church. If, after the matter has been thoroughly tested, first by the local church, secondly by State conference, and finally by the National Conference, the church has a very large house outside of her organization into which both reason and the gospel would say, turn him for the sake of the church and possibly for his own good.

We are not ignorant of the fact that some go so far as to claim we have no gospel right to turn any body out of the church. All we have to say in reply to this is, if there is no door *out* of the church there is none *into* it, and if that is true, we may as well disband and save ourselves much trouble, labor and anxiety.

Doctor Parkhurst and those who stand

with him are pursuing the proper course. So far they are working in the only lawful way there is open for the elimination of the objectionable part of their creed, and if he is overruled in the constitutional way, our word for it, he will show the good sense to peaceably submit for the present, or the dignity to quietly withdraw as Dr. McGiffert did recently. In fact the only decent thing for a dissenter to do, who will not work in harmony with the church is to withdraw in peace.

The time was when some of us failed to agree with the body with which we stood identified and the most we regret now is that when we found that union in the church was impossible, that we did not withdraw without the much wrangling thru which we passed. Hence, our way of thinking is this, when a member is placed in an irreconcilable attitude toward the church he has reached the limit of his Christian liberty in the church and his best way is to find it in a more congenial element outside of the church.

THE FATHER'S WORDS

C. H. WETHERBE

In Christ's prayer, as given in the seventeenth chapter of John, there is this passage: "Now they know that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are from thee; for the words which thou gavest me I have given unto them, and they received them."

I see great significance in this declaration. In view of the fact that some Christian scholars tell us that the words of the Bible are not divinely inspired, but simply the thoughts and truths of God are given by inspiration, while the words are those of the Bible writers, it is well to observe that Christ said that he had given "the words" of the Father to his disciples. He did not say that he had given "the thought" of God to them; he did not say that he had given the substance of what his Father had told him; he plainly declared that he had given his disciples "the words" of his Father. It would seem that both the Father and Son regarded the exact words of the Father's messages as being as important as the truths, commands and doctrines which were conveyed by the words. Words are expressions of thought. Truth cannot be accurately stated without appropriate words. There must be a close correspondence between the truth and the words which convey the truth.

The Father, it seems, expressed his mind in certain words to Christ, and those words were given to the disciples by Christ just as they were given to him. It was thus that Christ was thoroughly faithful to his Father. He could not vary a particle from anything which his Father told him to say to his people.

And how did Christ get those words? I think that it was thru prayer to the Father. He was all the while praying to his Father, and it seems likely that during such seasons the Father told him what to say and what to